

Man

Fearfully and wonderfully

Made.



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“ I am fearfully and wonderfully made : marvellous are thy works ; and that my soul knoweth right well.”

PSALM cxxxix. 14.

IT is an easy and natural transition of the Psalmist from thoughts of the omniscience and omnipresence of God to a contemplation of the wondrous frame of man. Many evidences, indeed, there are around us of “ the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God,” and many clear indications of His universal presence ; but nowhere are these truths more apparent than in man himself. He has within the compass of his own frame the most powerful demonstration of the creative skill and all-sustaining presence of Him “ in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being.” Such appears to be the line of thought followed in this Psalm, which, opening with the sublimest description of these glorious attributes of Jehovah, proceeds to illustrate them by a consideration of the nature of man, of the wonderful power displayed in his formation, and in the providential care exercised over him. After expatiating in glowing language on the all-pervading presence of God, the Psalmist asks (ver. 7), “ Whither shall I go from thy Spirit ? or whither shall I flee from thy presence ? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there : if I make my bed in hell (hades), behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of

the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For"—assigning this as a proof that God seeth in darkness, and that nothing is hidden from Him—"thou hast possessed or formed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest part of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." In the midst of this sublime description, the Psalmist interrupts himself to give utterance to his feelings of wonder and admiration of the goodness and power of God. "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."

In this language we may not understand the Psalmist as contemplating himself merely in a philosophical way, as an anatomist or metaphysician might do, looking upon the human body as a wonderful and most curious piece of mechanism, and the human mind, so far as we can discern its faculties, and actions, and sympathies, displaying resources of creative and providential skill even yet more astonishing,—we may not suppose that the Psalmist thus contemplated himself merely as an object of deep interest and searching curiosity; but we must suppose that his

thoughts ascended from the creature to the Creator ; that he connected the wonderful object before him with the highest thoughts of the origin and destiny of man. For what end was he formed ? with what view does he exist ? and what portion is he hereafter to inherit ? These are thoughts which would naturally connect themselves with the subject in a pious mind, and give the tone to its reflections.

I. With this view the Psalmist would contemplate the structure of the human frame, both of body and mind. With this view he would consider the skill displayed in the formation of the limbs and other members of the body, at once so harmoniously diversified, and yet so perfectly one—the wonderful aptitude of all the members of the body—of the foot, the hand, the eye, the ear, the tongue—to perform their proper functions ; and then the curious and well-supported frame to which they belong. As the patriarch Job had sung long before, “Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews.” It is true, indeed, that the wonders of the human frame, even such as lie open to our perception, are only partially seen by the unlearned. It is true that the aid of science must be brought in, that we may see with clearer light how wonderfully we are made ; and the deeper the research, the more marvellous is the scene disclosed. The beautiful provision for the circulation of the blood, and for the distribution of nourishment through the body ; the wonderful adaptation of parts which form the joints, the sinews, the muscles ; the extreme delicacy, and yet strength of fibres and nerves, on the proper action of which the comfort and enjoyment of

man so much depend—all this, and much more that might be named, requires knowledge and opportunities which do not fall to the lot of all men. But there is apparent to all who will give themselves the trouble to think, enough to excite feelings akin to those which are expressed in the text, enough to convey a deep impression of the wonder-working power of God. And then, too, when we contemplate the human mind, when we trace its development from infancy to adult age, its powers of thought and expansion, the rapidity of its action, its flexibility, its capacity for good or evil, the greatness of its conceptions, and the infinite variety of its susceptibilities,—all these are marvellous indications of the wonder-working hand of Him who made us.

Now I do not wish to press the force of those inferences which may be deduced from such reflections beyond its due measure; but thus far it may be fairly considered to extend, that it urges upon those not wilfully blind, serious thoughts of the depth of divine contrivance, of the care which has been bestowed upon man, and the providence extended over him. And to a mind rightly constituted, this will give rise to a conviction similar to that expressed in the words before us. The inference seems obvious and direct, that man is not thus formed without an adequate end in view, that he has some high destinies in store for him. It is surely not too much to conclude that God has not bestowed all this care and pains in vain. If it should be said that we may discover much of the same handiwork in the formation of many of the lower creatures concerning which no such inference is to be drawn; it must be replied, that the possession of mind and intelligence forms

a wide distinction of one class from the other; and, moreover, the lower animals are made for man, to be subject to him, and subservient to his interests; so that, in truth, the more we see of the power and skill of the Creator manifested in their formation, the more glory do we see reflected upon man, and the more powerful is the conviction which arises, that God pre-eminently cares for him.

Here, then, certainly is enough to arrest our thoughts, and lead us to reflection. "We are fearfully and wonderfully made." If there were nothing else to condemn the man who lives without God in the world, "who regards not the work of the Lord, nor considers the operation of His hand," this would be sufficient to condemn him. There is something which should inspire awe in the thought of skill so great, of such deep and varied wisdom having been expended upon us:

"With awful joy I view this frame of mine,  
Stupendous monument of power divine."

It bears the impress of the Almighty hand—it tells of God; it seems to forbid all trifling with ourselves; it teaches us to reverence the body as God's work, and the intelligent soul as a faint reflection of the infinite intelligence. Woe to that man who reads none of these lessons: he carries with him his own condemnation: he is a contradiction to himself; he is assuredly without excuse.

II. But let us take another view of this reflection of the Psalmist, and consider it in connexion with the susceptibility of the human frame to the sensations of pain or pleasure. There is something most fearful and most deeply impressive in this thought. What intolerable anguish is often

endured in the bodily frame alone ; nay, in one part, even in one little nerve of the body ! It is unnecessary here to inquire into the probable reasons of the Creator having invested the earthly tabernacle of man with such capacities for suffering, or to suggest the merciful ends which, on the whole, may be answered by it. These points have been insisted upon by many writers ; but we have now only to do with the fact, that the frame of man is so constituted : it is sensitive in every part, it is susceptible of the most exquisite pain, it furnishes a thousand channels for intense and unassuageable suffering. One cannot contemplate its capacities in this respect without some feeling of awe—without confessing that we are indeed fearfully made.

And still more deep is the impression of this truth which arises from considering the susceptibility of the human soul—of the intellectual principle within us. “ The spirit of man may sustain his infirmities, but a wounded spirit who can bear ? ” We can scarcely put limits to the powers of human endurance in one who has soundness of mind to sustain him. Even without the aid of religion they are great. It is perhaps the feature of our fallen nature which conveys to us the highest idea of what it once was. We may see the mind stern, and strong, and self-possessed, while the outward frame is torn with every kind of torture ; and immeasurably higher do these mental capacities rise when the soul is sustained by religion. What tortures have not been inflicted on Christian martyrs ! who have endured them not merely with resignation, but with holy joy, deeming themselves favoured by suffering such things for the sake of Christ and His Gospel ; who have re-



mained firm and unshaken witnesses to the truth under all that the inventive malice of men could inflict. But what is to sustain a man when the mind itself is diseased—when the torment has its seat there? So far as we can see, the human soul seems invested with capacities for the most intense happiness or misery. It is not mere hyperbole when persons tell us that they suffer or enjoy more than can be described;—it is literally the fact. The powers of language are too weak to convey the correct idea. Who can tell of the pangs of wounded affection—of the love of a parent, for instance, ungratefully requited? or who has tasted, if but for a moment, the wretchedness of despair? or who has known, though in a little measure, the terrors of the Lord upon his soul, with deep convictions of sin and fearfulness of divine anger,—and will not say that such sufferings are beyond the powers of human tongue to tell? And the same, doubtless, may be said to some extent of spiritual joys; of “the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us;” of “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding;” of the “hope which is full of immortality;” of possessing “the first-fruits of the Spirit;” and the foretaste (ever so slight) of pleasures which are at God’s right hand for evermore.

Let us, then, realise all this of ourselves, and then confess that we are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made. What a solemn—what an awful thought, that we are beings invested with capacities such as these; that we have within us the elements of such sorrow and such joy; that we are vessels of such wrath, or of such mercy; capable of such depression, or of such exaltation; and of such

misery and such bliss ! Oh, who can really contemplate these things, and not be an amazement to himself—a wonder and an astonishment to his own thoughts ? Who must not feel the immeasurable importance of his own destinies, and the most fearful alternative involved therein ? “Hearken unto this,” says Elihu to Job ; “stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God ;” —but infinitely surpassing all is man himself, the last and greatest work of God.

III. But there is another feature in man’s existence which will occur to every one, as illustrating the language of the Psalmist—I mean his immortality. When God created man, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; He invested him with a portion of His own immortality. Man is destined to an eternal existence. There is something fearful in the simple announcement of this truth, if we really reflect upon it. If we strive to get the best notion we can of eternity ; if we multiply ages by ages ; if we strive to think of a state in which, however long we exist, millions and millions of ages, and yet never approach nearer to its end, and then reflect that we are to live in that state, not our souls only, but our bodies also ; that we, just as we are as to the essential constitution of our being—that we are invested with such a power of life as no lapse of ages shall impair, as no length of time shall bring into decay ; that we shall never cease to exist, never cease to be conscious,—this, I say, is an awful thought, and powerfully illustrates the Psalmist’s reflection, “we are fearfully and wonderfully made.” And this thought must be taken in connexion with what has been already said of the structure of the mind and

body, and of their susceptibility of pleasure and pain. Take along with this the fundamental truth of religion—that this state is one of preparation for eternity; that we are here forming habits which are to endure through eternity—that we are here laying up treasures of good or stores of wretchedness, from which we must draw through the countless ages of eternity; that whatever men now sow, they shall hereafter reap; for “he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting;” that every man is treasuring up his own future portion, against the day of the righteous judgment of God, “who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil”—with all this in view, consider how awful is the truth of our immortality! how fearful the privilege of never dying! the certainty of a resurrection to life, and a resurrection to damnation! How joyful, and yet how fearful the thought! what interest hangs upon the alternative! what sorrows and what joys are to be realised by our race! What a position it is that we are placed in! how fearful, and yet how blessed to live, if we are using life aright! how fearful, and yet how blessed to die, if death shall place us beyond reach of danger! How dreadful to live, if life is abused to purposes of sin! how dreadful to die, if death places us beyond the possibility of repentance! Finally,

IV. To these considerations we may add that of the *mysteriousness* of the powers of man. After all our searching, how little do we know of ourselves ! how little do we know either of our souls or bodies ! We know no more than meets our senses, or our feeble mental perceptions ; and all that we do know seems but to shew us our ignorance. There is doubtless much that God sees in our material frames, as well as in our souls and spiritual being, which is altogether hidden from our view. Some evidence of this is afforded us by facts occurring to us altogether unaccountable ; and something within us, perhaps more or less experienced by most persons, which seems a reaching forth out of and beyond ourselves. At least it will be admitted, that in many things man is a mystery to himself ; and those who know themselves the most, will feel that they know the least.

The lesson, then, I think, which this subject teaches us, is the most profound and prostrate humility before God. “ It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves.” We are in His hand. He that created us what we are alone knows how to order our steps. We ought to feel like little children in a father’s hand ; and what is left to us but the most implicit obedience ? If we were otherwise than what we are ; if our powers were defined, and within the compass of our own knowledge ; if our existence were limited within the bounds of time ; if our capacity for happiness or misery were understood by us, or could be computed by us ; in a word, if there were less to risk,—there might be more excuse for men who assume an independent attitude, and venture to reason where they ought to obey ; and then there

would seem a less degree of folly, if not of blameworthiness, in the mass of Christians, who are not making religion the first great object of life. But if we are so fearfully and wonderfully made; if we can see enough within us to inspire us with the most awful view of our own being, our own prospects, our own interests,—then what madness it is to stumble at God's commands by the glimmering light of our own understanding, or to neglect God's command from the love of the world! What becomes us but a trembling apprehension lest, through trusting to our own guidance, we should pervert the grace of God, and through our own negligence we should fail of the grace of God? What becomes us but the profoundest humility, and the most implicit obedience, and the most urgent and watchful diligence,—lest by any means we should be staking interests and involving results, the value of which we cannot see?

And how greatly is this consideration enhanced by the great fact of redemption! If, from our own observance of ourselves—from the study of our own nature and existence,—we thus get at the conclusion that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, how is that conclusion verified by the work which God has done for us in Jesus Christ! What may we not infer concerning the value of our own interests; concerning the immensity of our risks; concerning the depth of woe, or the height of glory in store for us, from the fact that God gave His only begotten Son to humble Himself even to the death upon the cross for us miserable sinners; who lay in darkness and the shadow of death, that He might make us the children of God, and exalt us to everlasting life!

What are we, that such a work has been done for us ! How fearful—how blessed—to be the subjects of such redemption ! What characters of guilt it must stamp on the negligence or disobedience of man ! What a path does it open to the glory of God ! It is surely the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death. Wherefore beware, and give diligence to make your calling and election sure. Be diligent in the use of all means. Take heed lest you fail of the grace of God—lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God ; but exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. D.

